



Connecticut General Assembly
SENATE DEMOCRATS

Legislative Office Building, Room 3300
Hartford, Connecticut 06106-1591

March 8, 2022

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF

**SB 3 AN ACT REQUIRING THE BOARD OF REGENTS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION
TO DEVELOP SEMINAR PROGRAMS FOR SMALL BUSINESSES.**

Senator Slap, Representative Elliott, Senator Witkos, Representative Haines and members of the Higher Education and Employee Advancement Committee:

Thank you for hearing this bill on helping our small businesses in Connecticut deal with a rapidly changing world.

In the past two years, because of COVID-19, we have all had to make significant changes in our lives and to how we conduct our business. While we are hoping that we see the light at the end of the tunnel on the pandemic, some of the changes that were made temporarily may become a way of life in the future.

No one felt this sudden impact of change more than our small businesses, retailers, and our mom-and-pop restaurants. Many, faced with potential extinction, had to adapt quickly to a new world where customer needs had to be met in ways in which these operators had never contemplated, or never imagined they would be part of the way they did business.

Curbside pickup, online ordering, website development and delivery services of everything from pizza, to beer, to toilet paper became the only way to survive. Many of these business owners did not have the technological know-how to work in this modern world. They came to rely on tech companies to implement programs that three years ago they could not have imagined needing.

While we all became very familiar with conference call lines, zoom meetings and virtual voting, for small business owners they became dependent on door-dash, grub hub and Instacart just to name a few.

While these solutions that kept many businesses (especially restaurants) afloat seemed temporary, it is clear that consumers have become accustomed to these modern advancements and will not want them to go away.

The concern for the small business owners is that these outside services drain cash out of an enterprise that tends to live on the margins. Many of these services have multi layered fee structures that can make the process either too expensive for the customer or unsustainable for the business owner. Some restaurant delivery companies charge not only a fee to the customer, but another fee to the business as a percentage of the sale. In addition, they further take flat fees from the restaurant to pay for marketing. These fees add up, turning a marginally profitable business into a losing proposition.

Many of the owners do not possess the technical skills to tackle this problem on their own. Luckily, we have existing programs in our Community Colleges here in Connecticut that can help these people out. Under this bill, the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities will develop a program at both the Northwestern Connecticut Community College Entrepreneurial Center and the Werth Innovation and Innovation and Entrepreneurial Center at Housatonic Community College to help.

This program will consist of a series of seminars to help these businesses better understand the world of ecommerce, social media and maintaining an internet presence. It doesn't mean that we expect every one of these businesses to become tech wizards, it just means that they can get training on how to navigate this new world we are living in.

The program is simple, it says that any owner of a business of 25 or less employees, or up to two of their employees, may take these seminars free of charge. Because these seminars can be offered online, these two colleges can provide access to any of these businesses regardless of its location.

We don't think the cost of such a program will be significant. We do think demand will be greatest in the next two years. Therefore, the bill uses existing

American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to cover the costs for the community colleges to implement it.

While the cost is minimal, the impact it can have on our small businesses could be significant. These businesses sustained us during the darkest days of the pandemic, it is our turn now to make sure they are sustained in the future.

Thank you for your consideration of this legislation.



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Senate President Pro Tempore
State Senator 11th District



Bob Duff
Senate Majority Leader
State Senator 25th District



Marilyn Moore
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